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## Trades Unions & Labour

What should be our attitude to the Labour Party and the Labour government? That's the difficult question that faces trade unionists throughout Britain and here in Yeovil. As a trades union council we have no common opinion on the matter, except on one point: we are not supporters of New Labour and neo-liberalism.

Some are staying in the Labour Party in order to make it return to its original purpose – to represent the interests of working people and trade unions in parliament; others have long ago left the Labour Party in disgust and believe that returning it to its original purpose is a lost cause; some are in other left-wing parties; some have no firm view on the matter. Some warn that, however bad this New Labour government is, a Tory government would be a great deal worse.

The editorial team of this newsletter cannot settle the dispute between the different views outlined above; but we believe that mass action to defend and improve pay and conditions, pensions and public services, universal benefits including council housing and progressive taxation can help to transform the situation, and we will support all these struggles. We especially look forward to a united pay campaign by all the public sector unions, faced, as they are, by a single government policy to cut their pay in real terms.

The latest election results herald the end of New Labour and this creates new opportunities. Seize the time!

**Agitate, educate, organise!**

## Funeral of a working-class hero

Yeovil TUC's banner was carried proudly at the funeral of Howard "Andy" Andrews in Taunton on 22<sup>nd</sup> May. Andy, whose 101<sup>st</sup> birthday had been celebrated only three months earlier in a memorable event organised by the Somerset Association of Trades Union Councils, had been a member of a volunteer medical unit in the Spanish Civil War, fighting in 1936-38 to defend Spanish democracy against the combined forces of Franco, Hitler and Mussolini at a time when Britain's government of Neville Chamberlain was appeasing Hitler in the hope that he would destroy communism. Andy experienced strafing from German and Italian planes, and shell-fire.

Coming from a poor family in Kilburn, he had joined the Army at 16. Posted to India in 1924 as a private in the Royal Army Medical Corps, he was disgusted by the way the British Empire treated its colonial subjects. He later said "I became a red from the first time I set foot in India".

Moving to Taunton in the 1950s, Andy became branch secretary of COHSE (later absorbed into UNISON) at Musgrove Park Hospital and was a delegate to Taunton Trades Union Council until his retirement. About 100 trade unionists, political activists, friends, neighbours and relations turned out for his funeral, including members of his bowls club in their uniforms. Former TGWU leader and pensioners' campaigner Jack Jones (95), who also fought in Spain, made a rare public appearance, and messages came from Tony Benn and from the "Amigos" - the friends, in Spain, of the anti-fascist volunteers. Marlene Sidaway of the International Brigade Memorial Trust presided, and the main oration, full of interesting and often amusing details, was given by trade unionist Dave Chapple of Bridgwater, who had befriended Andy in recent years. The ceremony ended with the singing of "The Internationale". At a reception afterwards in the Quaker Meeting House in Taunton, members of the Bristol Red Notes sang "There is power in the union" and "Viva La Quince Brigada".

Active to the end, Andy was Chair of Somerset branch of the Communist Party. Fittingly, some of the mourners went straight to Chard afterwards to leaflet the ward where the fascist BNP had a candidate in the local council by-election. Andy would have been delighted.

## Around the Town & District

### ■ Yeovil Tax office threatened with Closure ■ Post Offices

In response to the government's so called programme of efficiency savings across the civil service, the Revenue & Customs office in Yeovil has been earmarked for closure with the loss of some seventy jobs. The department as a whole has already shed nearly 15,000 jobs nationwide with another 10,000 to go by 2011. This is justified by the introduction of new technology and centralising offices in fewer and fewer locations. The government's record on introducing new technology has been disastrous and there is nothing to suggest that this time will be any different. The locations where the big offices are being centralised, usually in the bigger cities will lead to a high turnover of staff and the loss of loyal experienced and knowledgeable existing staff.

Service to the public has taken second place to this obsession with cost cutting. PCS does not defend wasting public money but this vicious attack on staff numbers has led to backlog of work and people finding it harder and harder to get through to the contact centres. This situation has been made worse by the fact that the enquiry centres in local offices are prevented from doing what they have traditionally done best, helping taxpayers and simply pointing people with problems to a telephone; if local offices are closed this situation can only be exacerbated.

The vast majority of people who work in the tax office in Yeovil are members of PCS. An Office Campaign Committee has been set up to fight this office closure. Success very much depends on the involvement of as many members as possible; at this stage the signs are encouraging. One thing is certain, if we fight we may win, if we do nothing, we will definitely lose.

*Mark Hoskins - PCS Office Secretary, HMRC Yeovil.*

**National Shop Stewards Network  
Second Conference  
Saturday 28<sup>th</sup> June**

Full report in next issue of the newsletter

Many are quick to attack the government over the closure of post offices across the country; including myself – but rarely do we hear the deeper, fundamental reason for this decline, let alone the solution. The Labour government's biggest mistake has been the continuation of many of the Thatcherite (Washington consensus neo-liberalism) policies of the Conservatives – the selling off of public assets to private companies all in the name of the free market and neo-liberalism in an attack upon so called "state involvement" seemingly forgetting that at least the state is democratic, more than what can be said about private companies.

Over the last decade thanks to the liberalisation of the postal services, the Royal Mail Group has seen their more profitable areas of business handed over to private companies, while they get left to handle the unprofitable work. Nowadays the surplus from the more profitable areas no longer goes into subsidising the Post Office network, they go into the pockets of a few businessmen, and of course we lose out.

The Tories and Liberals are quick to blast the government for carrying out the very same set of policies that they themselves embrace, what would they suggest we do? Re-establish Royal Mail's monopoly and take over all the public assets that have been privatised – of course not. You're never going to hear them suggest that. But those are exactly the sort of radical policies we need to save the Post Offices. The only place these policies are going to come from is a Labour government worthy of the name, carrying out socialist policies, something many of us today are fighting for both within the Labour Party and in the wider labour movement outside of it.

*Paul Smith prospective Labour parliamentary candidate for Yeovil*

**Yeovil Sports Zone on open Yeovil TUC** meeting on the Yeovil "Sports Zone"  
Wednesday 21<sup>st</sup> May 2008 @ Unity Hall – report

Present were the main speakers Councillor Tim Caroll leader of SSDC, and Ashley Strelling of "Save Mudford Recreation ground".

**Jacky Martin** from "Save Mudford Recreation ground" gave a lead off by claiming that the Sports zone would be partly financed by selling off other assets; that there are other locations for it, part off Agusta/Westland airfield or land by Yeovil Town Football Club; could it be part of the development framework?

## Sports Zone - continued

This proposal was first made 26th July 2007 and the consultation period was to close 24<sup>th</sup> August 2007.

That land around the Yeovil College was sold off for executive housing.

SMR collected over 5000 signatures opposing the sports zone being built on Mudford Recreation ground.

How will it be financed and why has other sites been discounted? E.g. the showground.

**SSDC Council leader Councillor Tim Martin** replied to the points raised.

As part of the 20year development for the Town, and their research has it that the greatest deficiency of sports facilities occurred in Yeovil. The 20 year plan envisages an increase of the Town's population of the current 44K to about 77K.

As for discounting the other sited, there was no chance of it being located on the Agusta/Westland Airfield. The piece of land by the YTFC was subject to something called a PPS5 planning restraint.

That no decision has yet been made, the whole plot will not be concreted over and late summer will see the results of the full survey.

There are similar projects under way in Taunton, Bristol and Plymouth. If it went ahead, completion would be sometime in 2012.

Points and questions raised came mainly from objectors to the proposal focussed mainly on the loss of a substantive piece of open space and traffic congestion and related problems. There would be 400 car spaces

That a big opportunity was lost at the time of the decision to build the current Golden Stones fitness centre; that it was too small, and went way over budget – is a similar mistake to be repeated?

As for the traffic problem, Councillor Carroll, replied; that Reckleford and Babylon hill "Bermuda triangle" is to be sorted.

## Union Conferences – Reclaim Labour?

The trades unions are sending a clear message to their members, get back in the Labour party and fight for union policies and make a difference

### Unite Conference

Out going executive chairman stated 'UNITE's position is very simple. As far as our members are concerned, there is only one game in town and that is the Labour Party'

However the party has been hijacked by new labour. 'As both Tony Woodley and Derek Simpson say, new labour is neither new nor is it Labour'

The outgoing chairman said 'We will use our organisation, our activists to retake the Labour Party because at the end of the day, it is ours.'

'It was our grandmothers and grandfathers who set it up and we will retake it. In the words of Labour Party founder Keir Hardy 'We will send to Parliament one of our own'

We will send hundreds of our own to Parliament and that is what will make the difference – working class activists representing working class people'

But he said that they have to convince members to go that extra mile.

In that sense we will work with the best of the MPs At the last Amicus executive we removed 20 MPs from our sponsored list and there is a very strong warning to our so-called sponsored MPs- ignore what we are saying and there will be more to go.

### GMB Conference

Conference has decided to stop sponsoring MPs who are not supportive of members aspirations and the unions policies.

The GMB general sec. Paul Kenny said that some MPs currently sponsored by the GMB had not supported union policies, not responded to requests for help or had simply not engaged with local branches. He also warned that the union could reduce the size of its annual affiliation currently worth £1.2 million a year.

Labour is £24 million in debt and has over £13 million worth of loans up for renegotiation this year. "We are not going to use our money to pay back loans to multi-millionaires who lent money to the party on the whim that they might get a knighthood," said Kenny.

At the end of the debate members agreed to stop sending money to over 30 MPs accusing them of not supporting union campaigns.

There was anger over the closure of Remploy factories employing disabled workers, the union will continue to campaign against.

The GMB plans to plough more resources into encouraging members to get involved with their constituency Labour Parties increase influence over party policies.

## Tolpuddle Martyrs Festival

The annual Tolpuddle Martyrs Festival goes on getting bigger and better, with a huge variety of events and attractions over the weekend 18-20<sup>th</sup> July.

On the Friday evening (if you're not going to Graham Moore's show in Dorchester) there is "Happy 90<sup>th</sup> birthday Nelson Mandela" in the Martyrs' Marquee. On the Saturday there is Poetry and Politics session followed by a topical discussion "Tolpuddle to Tesco's" about the way we produce our food and drink, with expert speakers. There is the Bedouin Jerry Can Band – yes, real Bedouins; and on Saturday night you can hear comedian Mark Steel with protest singer Sean Taylor and dance to pub rock band The Tones and great Cajun band The Flatville Aces. It's all free!

On Sunday there is the local y'Strels Band; songs by Tracy Curtis; Elvis McGonagall (stand-up poet and armchair revolutionary); Duckfeet; Ways of the Mouth; Robb Johnson and the Irregulars; singer Graham Moore; Seize the Day; Salsa and Congolese Rumba group Grupo Lokito; and other attractions.

In the afternoon there is the usual procession and rally, with UNISON General secretary and TUC President Dave Prentis, Elaine Bernard of the Harvard Trade Union Centre, USA (does Harvard really have a trade union centre?) and Dot Gibson of the National Pensioners Convention, Tony Benn, Kate Allen of Amnesty International, TUC General Secretary Brendan Barber and Ms Hashemiya Muhsin Hussein, President of Iraq's Electricity and Energy Union. The procession will be led by the Musician's Union's Great Western Jazz band.

In addition to the above, there are activities for children: stories, a drum band to join, fancy dress making and parachute games, a bouncy castle, and activities organised by the Woodcraft Folk children's organisation. A great many organisations will have stalls promoting their ideas and campaigns, and there is an ample supply of food and drink to buy on site. Camping space is available.

For more information, see [www.tuc.org.uk/tolpuddle](http://www.tuc.org.uk/tolpuddle)

The event is organised, as usual, by the South West TUC, and it gets better every year. YeoTUC is organising a minibus on the Sunday – contact Vivian Willis for details at bottom of this page

*The Tolpuddle Martyrs in Song and Story* by Graham Moore tells the true story of the six Dorset farm labourers who were transported to Australia for taking an illegal oath (but, in reality, for joining a trade union). This atmospheric performance is set in the preserved original Old Crown Court where their trial took place in 1834. It includes songs from Grahame Moore's acclaimed "Tolpuddle Man" and he performs it accompanied by Gill Redmond on Cello. There will be an opportunity to visit the cells.

The performance is on Friday 18<sup>th</sup> July – the opening night of Tolpuddle Martyrs' Festival weekend – and tickets cost £9.00 for adults or £6.00 for under-18s from Dorchester Tourism Information, 01305 267992. Numbers are limited.

The Tolpuddle Martyrs were a group of agricultural labourers who were tried and transported to Australia for the 'crime' of trying to form a union. Their story is key to the formation of modern trades unionism.



**Unite/TGWU are providing a coach to Tolpuddle, leaving Labour Club, Yeovil 11AM Sunday 20<sup>th</sup> July 2008.**

To book your place contact and Vivian Willis 07855 320041 [vivianvjw@aol.com](mailto:vivianvjw@aol.com) All members welcome

Yeovil TUC meets every third Wednesday of the month @ the address below. All union members welcome (though only delegates may vote). Meetings start @ 19:30hrs. Is your branch affiliated? Contact us for an application form.

Want copies of this newsletter? What's going on in your workplace? Do have any comments? Please contact us:

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